Fragments

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Fragments

by muse_apollo

Summary

Three years after the events of Captive Heart, Jack Crawford comes calling on Will again.

Notes

it's finally begun folx… I've had this one sitting on the back burner for a while, but I figured I could at least start putting it out...

Chapter 1

Hannibal Lecter sat in his cell, quiet and stoic. He was pouring over newspapers, he had several publications sent to him, enjoyed following the news, even locked up in this cell. He folded the pages, neatly selecting articles to tear out with near gleeful enthusiasm. It'd been three long, and rather boring years of this, and he was glad to see that things were picking up.

The door opposite his cell swung open, he was stored in his own private corner of the hospital after causing too much trouble with the other patients. He glanced up at the sound. Alana Bloom stood before his cell, her arms crossed over her chest, as much a defensive gesture as a sign of irritation. He had known she was coming, he had requested her visit. "What do you want, Hannibal?"

"Interesting things in the papers." He smiled, a tight, sharp thing. "How's Jack Crawford fairing with this one? Not well, I imagine, with his prize pony so long out to pasture."

The clench of Alana's jaw was the only sign of her emotional response to the casual reference to Will Graham.

Hannibal smiled as he continued. "Speaking of, how is Will? He's not replied to any of my letters."

"That should be a hint to leave him alone, Hannibal."

"Or maybe you don't know either."

She didn't take the bait, it had been some time since her and Will had last spoken, he was right, but he didn't need to know that. "I will walk out of here if you don't get to the point in the next five seconds."

"Jack is stuck. I think I can be of some assistance in that regard."

She froze at the words. "Hang on, you want to help?"

"Why not?" He cocked his head to one side. "I've consulted for the FBI before."

"For personal gain. You were consulting on your own murders."

"Well, I caught me. Didn't I?"

" *Will Graham* caught you." The words were clipped, her eyes dark and curious.

"That's one way of describing the events." A smile crossed his lips. "Ultimately, I turned myself in."

"Could you please get to the point?"

“I want you to tell Jack about my offer. That’s all.”

“There has to be something in this for you.”

“Does there seem to be?” His smile widened. “It doesn’t matter anyway. If I’m correct, the FBI has a little over two weeks to catch this one. The clock is ticking, I’m sure Jack isn’t stupid enough to turn down help where he can get it.”

“Fine.” She paused, stepping a bit closer to the bars, watching him carefully. “Just know, Hannibal, I’m keeping an eye on you, whatever game you’re playing, you won’t win.”

“Of course not.” He gestured to the cell around him. “I’ve already lost, haven’t I?”

His words didn’t seem to assuage Alana’s doubts. Of course not. She was far too smart for that. Still, it didn’t matter. She would do as he’d asked. She had no other choice.

*****

Finding Jack Crawford at the end of his driveway wasn’t exactly the best case scenario. In fact, he’d go so far as to say it was among the worst possible cases. Not the worst, but certainly up there.

He didn’t bother giving the other man the opportunity to greet him, just gave an answer to the question which he knew was inevitable. “No.”

“Will.”

“Jack.” Will snapped in retort, his eyes were dark as he watched the other man. “No. I’m not talking to you. Get back in your car. Go back to Quantico. You’ve wasted a trip.”

“How do you know I’m not here for a friendly visit?”

Will turned now, halfway up the steps to his porch. He leaned on the railing post, his gaze tense where it met with Jack’s. “Because I watch the news. Now please, my wife will be back soon, and my stepson, and I don’t want you to be here when they are.”

“You have a family?” Jack watched him carefully from beneath the brim of his hat.

“Yes.”

“He’s *killing* families, Will.” He took a step closer, Will’s fists clenched just a bit. “Married couples, children. Just like yours.”

“Low blow, Jack.”

“Will, I need your help, I can’t catch him without you.” There was a desperation there, will saw it in the clench of his jaw, the widening of his eyes.

“This is my life now, Jack.” Will said simply. “You’re going to have to accept that.”

Jack opened his mouth to reply, but whatever it was he was going to say was cut off as the dogs came running up the hill, a swarm of wagging tails and wet noses, eager to greet their newly discovered guest.

“Fuck.” Will muttered, his eyes fell to where Molly and Walter appeared coming up the hill, Molly’s brow furrowed as she noticed the man standing at the stairs of her porch, her eyes flicked to Will, and he smiled tightly in response, as reassuring as he could.

“I wasn’t aware we were having company.” Molly said, when she reached the porch.

“It came as a surprise to me as well.” Will’s eyes met Jack as he spoke, a challenge.

“I was in town, couldn’t help stopping in to visit an old friend.” Jack smiled, a tight thing. “It is good to see you, Will.”

“Well, would you like to stay for dinner?” Molly asked, and Will cringed inwardly.

“I think Jack probably has a lot of work to do.”

Jack shook his head. “Nope, in fact, I’d love to stay for dinner, better than ordering takeout to my hotel room.”

Will pursed his lips, but said nothing. Instead he accepted the interaction for what he was, Jack would stay for dinner, and ultimately, nothing would come of his quest to drag Will back to work with him. It wasn’t a subject Will was willing to budge on.

Conversation over dinner was awkward, and stilted, Jack didn’t seem to know what part of Will’s life to ask about, made some crack about Walter getting taller than Will.

“His father was.” Was Will’s only response, it didn’t work to lighten the mood.

After Jack had left, forcing Will to accept his new number -he’d changed it in the last three years, which Will supposed made sense- Will sat on his bed, with Molly at his side, eyeing him curiously. He hadn’t thrown out the piece of paper with Jack’s number, instead it sat balled up in his pocket, with him finding himself unable to be rid of it.

“What was that about?” Molly asked. “And don’t tell me it was just an old friend coming to visit, I can tell when you’re upset about something.”

Will shook his head. “I used to work with Jack.” He said quietly. “Before…”

“Before you left the FBI?” She was careful in the way she said it, knowing all too well how sensitive the subject could be for him.

“Yeah.” He wiped a hand across his face, the skin around his eyes pulling down slightly with the contact. “He wants my help, says it’s just one more case but…” He sighed, looking up at her. “I don’t think I can do it.”

“You don’t have to do anything you don’t want to, Will.” She replied. “Why you? I’m sure he could have found someone else.”

“Because I’m the best. Or, was the best. He’s hit a dead end and he thinks he’s running out of time.”

“Do you think you could help?”

Will sighed. “I don’t know.” He admitted finally. “To be honest, I’m not sure if I can do it anymore.” He didn’t need to say what *it* was, she knew. “Do you want me to go?”

Molly was quiet for a long moment, as though choosing her next words carefully. “I’d feel satisfied in knowing that you were doing the right thing.” She said finally. “And I think it would weigh on you, if you didn’t go and someone else got hurt.”

“If I did go…” He paused, squeezing his eyes shut for a moment. “I’ll be different when I get back.”

“I won’t.” She replied, placing a hand on his shoulder. “And I’ll be here when you need me, to pull you through, no matter what.”

Will nodded, buried his face in her neck for a long moment, just breathing her in, savouring what was left of this.

*****

They didn’t talk about it anymore that night, but Will lay awake a long time, staring at the ceiling until he heard Molly’s breath even out, until she settled and rolled over, pressing her face down into the pillow the way she always did when she slept.

Then he sat up, easing himself out from under the blanket he crept from the room, into the den which functioned, at least in part, as his study. The top left drawer of the desk was where he kept them, placed beneath other files until he had had a chance to read them.

Usually they weren’t much, brief things, wishes of congratulations, of different kinds of celebration. Promises that held equal weight as threats. They came on specific dates, holidays and birthdays, this one had been off schedule.

Somehow he knew this one would be heavier. Somehow he knew, it was all coming back together again. With the Tooth Fairy came Jack, and closely following behind Jack came Hannibal.

The letter felt heavy in his hands, a thousand pounds at his fingertips as he tore it open, his hands shook too much so he caught the edge of the envelope with his teeth, tearing away the paper on the top.

He unfolded it carefully, almost reverently, fingers still shaking as he touched it.

The script was clean, and elegant. Familiar.

My darling Will,

He pressed his lips together as he read the opening line. It was far too easy to hear it in Hannibal's voice, as if he had remembered the way that voice sounded around each word, the way his tongue wrapped around every syllable.

We have all found a new life, but our old lives hover in the shadows. Soon enough, I fear Jack Crawford will come knocking. I would encourage you, as someone who loves you, not to step back through the door he holds open. It's dark on the other side my dear, and madness is waiting.

There was no signature, there never was. He never needed one. Will's hands tightened around the letter, creasing it where his fingers bit in. He held it for only a moment longer before he threw it into the open flames. It was only after the fire had engulfed the page, curling neatly around the letters, devouring each syllable, that he stood up. He washed his hands before he returned to his bed, they felt sticky, like there was blood on them, caked under his fingernails. He crawled under the blankets, pressed himself up against his wife's back, placed a kiss to her shoulder, and squeezed his eyes tight shut.

The next morning found him lying in bed with Molly, he'd barely slept last night, and what sleep he'd gotten was plagued by dreams, he didn't remember much distinct, a hand on his cheek, tender as could be, a knife in his gut, tearing him open, a beating heart in the palm of his hand.

He didn't think about it as he went about his morning routine, but his mind had been made up, he'd talk to Molly, and then he would call Jack. He would do this because it was what was necessary, and he wouldn't think about it.

He found himself scratching absently at his neck as he packed, the old scar there was sharp with pain this morning. Psychosomatic, he reminded himself, but still, he felt the sting of teeth in his flesh as though it were fresh.

The next morning found him on a flight to Baltimore. The hotel Jack had found for him was nice, complete with a mini bar, and Will found himself considering pouring a drink for the first time in some time.

He didn't drink, only just. Instead, he lay awake for a long time, praying as he fell asleep that he wouldn't dream.

He did.

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

> I've got a bunch of this stockpiled, so until I run out I guess I'll just keep updating? anyway, love yall, thanks for the support so far <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Going over the case was work, but it was work he was good at. It was surprisingly easy to lose himself in it, in the details and the files, and the monotony of it all.

Going to the Leeds house was the logical next step. Opening the door, he saw himself cutting the glass, the way the Tooth Fairy had, creeping in, saw all the plans playing out behind his eyes so logically. He walked through the house, saw the violence, the blood staining the walls, the memories of the horror which had taken place here. His ha nds shook as he flipped through the file. He looked at the page only a moment longer, knowing the paper could give him no more useful information, not without him expanding on what he already had.

He didn't want to do it. He took a deep breath, and he did it anyway.

I cut Mr. Leeds' throat.

He could hear the man choke, the gurgle of his breath, saw the blood leaving him in great gouts on the backs of his eyes. He heard the echoes of Mrs. Leeds scream as she watched her husband die.

I shoot Mrs. Leeds through the stomach, severing her cervical spine.

The children were the hardest memory, he'd been merciless with them, dragged the youngest one from under the bed to shoot him. It made Will's stomach churn to picture it. What he did to Mrs. Leeds was terrible, but at the very least it was after she had died.

There had been something on her skin… he flipped through the file again. Talcum from the gloves… He'd taken them off, he needed to touch her.

It was that quick, processing it. Fingerprints. Check the eyes, the face… the feet. You'd find some trace of him there.

He would call Jack tomorrow. Tonight he went back to his hotel room. Tonight, he still didn't pour himself a drink.

*****

Going into the lab was what threw him off. It had been too long, really, three years, give or take a few weeks. It was the thought of questions that plagued him, more than that, the thought of pity. It was Beverly that plagued him the most. They'd shared some small communication over the years, emails, occasional phone calls to check in, but the contact had always been minimal. She had seen him at his worst… and he feared more than anything, pity.

But he should have known he didn't have to worry. She looked at him for a moment as he came in, smiled, broad and kind, and put a hand on his shoulder, a brief squeeze, a reassurance. "It's good to have you back, Will."

"Wish I could say it was good to be back."

"Trust me, no one expects that of you." It's low enough that only he can hear.

Will met her smile affectionately. "So, what have we got?"

"Teeth." It was Price who spoke, glancing over his shoulder to where Will had come into the room. "And nasty ones by the look of 'em. Good to see you."

Zeller nodded at him as well.

"Dental impression's not much to go on."

"Neither is all the DNA we found, not without a match." Beverly crossed her arms. "But I'm betting he knew that, he's not sloppy."

"Sloppy's not the word…" Will shook his head. "This is… contemptuous. Prideful. He's goading us. Did you check for prints?"

"We think he wore gloves. No prints on points of entry in either place." Zeller was watching him curiously across the body of Mrs. Leeds.

"He took the gloves off."

"How do you know?"

"Talcum powder on the body. It was in the report. He took the glove off because he needed to touch her. He couldn't help himself." A pause. "Check the eyes, fingernails, toenails, even a partial is something to go on. If he's got a record, we might get a match."

"I'd forgotten how bossy you get." Zeller was only half teasing him.

"Get's things done." A pause. "He might have a history of biting in lesser assaults, could be a fighting pattern as much as a sexual behaviour." The scar on his shoulder twinged as he said it, he scratched it absently, noting dropping it when he saw Beverly's eyes on him for a moment. It wasn't the same, he reminded himself, it shouldn't be reassuring regardless, but it

was. He tugged his collar, making sure that it covered all of the skin there. There was something he needed to do. “Has anyone heard from Jack this morning?”

“Stuck in court dealing with some other case, as far as I know.” Beverly frowned. “Why?”

“I need to talk to him, I just thought of something.” He would talk to Jack tomorrow, there would still be time then.

“Care to share with the class?” Zeller raised an eyebrow.

Will shook his head. “It won’t help you. Let me know if you get anything off the prints, or the background checks. I’ll… let you work.” He left then, not quite sure where he was going, only that it wasn’t here. He would talk to Jack tomorrow, and everything would be fine.

*****

Hannibal sat in his cell, biding his time. Jack Crawford had yet to come calling, still, he would. Hannibal was sure of it. Time was running out, and the full moon had begun to roll around. With a deadline approaching, he would come.

More than that, Hannibal wondered if Will had received his letter. He wondered if Will would heed his warning. In some private, selfish part of his brain, he hoped he wouldn’t.

Three years was a long time, too long, truly. But he’d waited.

He only hoped he wouldn’t have to wait much longer.

******

Will did pour himself a drink that night. He needed it, he would, if he was going to go through with this. Tomorrow would be… well, he didn’t want to think about it. Right now, in this moment, tomorrow didn’t matter.

He called Molly, the line rang for a time before it went to the machine. He didn’t bother leaving a message, instead he hung up. He lay in bed awake for a long time after, half hoping she would call back and pull him out of his mind. In his head he saw blood, saw himself shooting Mrs. Leeds… shooting her sons.

In his head, he saw Hannibal smiling at him, with blood on his teeth.

Will poured himself another drink.

*****

The next morning finds him in Jack's office, sitting across from him.

"They had a dog." He said. "Reported injured."

"Yes, the dog seems to be the only surviving member of the Leeds family."

"What's going to happen to it?"

Jack sighed. "Please don't worry about the dog, Will."

"What do you expect me to do?"

Jack watched him for a long time, his brow furrowed deeply, questioningly. "The best you can." He said finally. "That's all."

He takes another long pause, and then takes the plunge. "There is something else I can do." Jack is silent, tense, waiting for him to finish. "I can wait until the full moon, until another family dies, to look at the evidence, or I can do what we both know I need to."

The corner's of Jack's mouth twitched up just a bitch, trying not to show how pleased he was with the outcome. "An opinion you want?"

"More of a… mindset I need to recover." He took a breath. If he finished his point, everything would change. "I need to see Hannibal."

Chapter End Notes

things are picking up boys.... lets go.

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

took me two chapters, but I brought these bastards together again.

Will arrived at the hospital as though coming out of a dream, dazed, with dread tying knots in the pit of his gut. He barely heard Chilton's speech about safety regulations. It wouldn't keep him safe anyway. Nothing Chilton said could brace Will's mind against what it was yet to endure.

He simply pressed his lips together as he was led down to the cell where Hannibal was kept. He was curious, what sort of cage they used to hold this beast… what bars could maintain the illusion of safety in the face of such a man.

And then Will saw him.

Hannibal stretched out on a cot in the corner, a book open on his chest, his eyes closed as if in sleep. He wasn't asleep, Will had seen Hannibal in his sleep enough to know what that looked like. He was softer in his sleep than he was now, his guard was down, and the tension in his shoulders finally left. This Hannibal wasn't asleep, he was waiting.

Will clenched his fists; every muscle in his body ached to step forwards, to wrap his hands around the bars, to drag himself as close to Hannibal as the restrictions between them would allow, but he held back. He shoved his hands deep into his pockets. He waited silent and stoic, until the guard left. The door shut behind him, and Hannibal's eyes opened.

Their gazes met and locked, and an old ache stirred in his chest. Hannibal stood, moved slowly across the room, his expression blank, veiled. They moved in sync, each stopping about a foot from the bars. Will's hands stayed in his pockets, balled tightly into fists, nails biting into skin; Hannibal kept his clasped firmly behind his back.

"Hello, Dr. Lecter."

Hannibal's expression cracked just a bit, the corners of his mouth quirked, his eyes softened. "Hello, Will. It's been too long."

"Not long enough."

He cocked his head just slightly to one side. "Did you get my letter?"

"Yes."

"Did you read it before you destroyed it, or did you simply throw it into the nearest fire?"

“I read it.” Will bit the inside of his cheek, struggling to keep emotion out of his voice. “And then I burned it.” He’d scrubbed his hands after touching it, until the skin went red, couldn’t stand the thought of Hannibal transferring from his skin to Molly’s.

“And yet you came anyway. I’m glad you did; after all, I did tell you our story was not at an end.”

“This story isn’t ours, Doctor. We’re just characters in it.”

“Are we no longer on a first name basis, Will?”

“I’m more comfortable the less personal we are.”

“Afraid to reignite a flame never quite extinguished?”

“Maybe I just don’t want to give you the satisfaction.”

Hannibal’s lips twitched a bit at that. It wasn’t quite a smile but there was certainly an amusement behind the expression. “You haven’t changed a bit, my dear. Tongue still as sharp as ever.”

Will hadn’t expected this. Openness was not something he had come prepared for, tenderness was a knife against which had no armour.

“I came about Chicago and Buffalo.”

“Is that all?"

“I’m not interested in playing games. You offered your help, and I’m here to accept it.”

“You are Crawford’s olive branch… or are you his Trojan horse?”

“If you don’t want to help me, I’ll walk out that door.”

“That doesn’t disprove my statement.”

“I want to know how he’s choosing them.”

“You truly believe I can offer insight you don’t already have?” A pause, as he cocked his head to one side, eyes narrowed, a hawk before the strike. “No, you just came here to look at me, needed to get the old scent back. Why not just smell yourself?”

“Goodbye, Hannibal.” Will turned to leave, he heard the slight hitch in Hannibal’s breath at the use of his name, the desired response. His hand touched the door and Hannibal relented.

“Wait.”

Will didn’t turn around right away, needing to hide his smile. “Yes?”

He glanced over his shoulder and swallowed at the vulnerability painted clear across Hannibal’s features for just a fraction of a second. “Give me the file. I’ll need some time to

look at it.”

Will turned back, approached the sliding food tray and placed the file in it, sending it through.

“Thank you.” Hannibal said, without breaking eye contact with Will as he takes the file in his hands.

“I’ll be back in a few hours.” Will said slowly.

“I wait with baited breath.” Hannibal replied. Will felt those eyes burning holes in the back of his neck all the way out the door.

*****

He called Molly when he got back to his hotel room, waited as the line rang, he could still see Hannibal’s smile on the backs of his eyelids.

He lay back on the bed, rubbed a hand across his eyes to try and clear the image away. Molly answered on the third ring. “You miss me already?”

“Yeah.” He didn’t mean to sound so tired when he said it.

She was silent for a moment. “Are you alright?”

“Weird day.” Will sighed. “How are things with you?”

“The same as they were when I saw you last week.” A pause. “Except Maggie. She’s been laying by the door crying all day. I think she misses you.”

Will nodded to himself, before remembering Molly couldn't see him. “Yeah." His voice cracked just a bit on the word. "She’s not used to being without me. It was just me and her for a long time.” Not a lie, an omission, a visible gap left in the air where Hannibal fit. Molly knew as well as he did. He didn’t have to say it.

“I miss you too, you know.”

“I know.” He smiled.

“And I love you.”

“I love you too.”

“And when all this is over, I’ll still be here waiting for you.”

Will was quiet for a long time after that one. “I know.” He pressed his lips together. “Can you just… tell me about your day?”

Molly did, and Will closed his eyes and tried not to remember where he was going when this conversation came to an end.

*****

It was upon his return to the hospital that Will found himself stumbling across Alana Bloom, just outside on the steps, as though waiting for him. Something told him it wasn't coincidence, running into her, something she then confirmed. "Jack told me you'd be here."

"I'm sure that conversation went over well." Will frowned.

"I almost killed him." She admitted. "Don't get me wrong, Will, it's good to see you. I only wish it were under better circumstances."

"If circumstances were better, you wouldn't see me at all." He shook his head. "Not unless you drove down to Florida for a visit."

"Never pictured you living somewhere like that."

"I needed a change of scenery."

"I know." She smiled, a tight, pitying thing. "How did it feel? To see him again?"

"Is this therapy?"

"A concerned friend."

Will sighed. "I felt like he looked into my eyes and could see right through to the back of my skull; like he crawled back into a space that had been empty for years." A pause. "I got the absurd feeling that he walked out with me, had to stop and look around to make sure he wasn't standing beside me."

She nodded, a slow, solemn thing. "I don't think you should be here, Will."

"I *know* I shouldn't. But I'm here. I saw those families, Jack showed me pictures and I couldn't say no."

"Did you consider that might be what Jack wanted?"

"I'm sure it is." He scratched absently at his neck. "I'm not letting him back in, Alana. Please don't worry about me."

"You know you can't ask me that."

"I know."

*****

When Will came back, Hannibal was leaning on his desk. His eyes were watchful and clever, his posture relaxed, comfortable even in this environment. It was easy for him to see Hannibal as he had so many times before, leaning on the desk in his office in front of the fireplace, a glass of wine in his hand, a smile dancing across his lips.

He had to shake the image off as he approached the bars of the cell once more.

“This is a very shy boy, Will.” Hannibal glanced up from the file, it was intimate. “Have you considered the possibility that he’s disfigured? Or that he thinks he is?”

“Obviously.” Will rolled his eyes. “I was hoping for some deeper insight, *doctor* .”

“You may call me by my first name.”

“This is a professional relationship, I’d like to keep it that way.”

“Professionalism is antithetical to everything we are.”

“There isn’t a ‘we’.” Will replied shortly. “There’s you giving me something useful or me walking out the door and never coming back.”

“If that’s the only threat you have, it’s going to get stale quickly.” His smile widened. “You came here for a reason, Will, and while leaving out of spite would be satisfying, its goes against that purpose. You *will* come back. I would appreciate more honesty on your part.”

“Clever assessment, Doctor. Still, you need to remember who holds the cards here, it’s not you.”

“I imagine you find that thrilling.”

“I find it fitting.” Will retorted. “A reversal of roles which was a long time coming.”

“And yet you waited so long to see me caged. Why deny yourself the satisfaction?”

“Have you considered that I didn’t *want* to see you?”

“You’re here now.” A sharp smile. “That has to count for something.”

Will, wisely, didn’t take the bait. “Your insight, doctor?”

“Please use my name.”

Will sighed, straightened his back, crossing his arms over his chest. “Fine. Your insight, *Hannibal* .”

Hannibal’s smile reached his eyes for the first time since Will has seen him in his cell. “I’ll offer insight, but I ask something in return.”

“I’m here. Isn’t that enough.”

Hannibal’s own hand came up to rest on the bars. Will’s eyes dropped to it, and he frowned.

“Really?” He scoffed. “You’re desperation is showing.”

Hannibal just watched him, silent, waiting.

“Fine.” Will reached out, one hand, his left hand, sliding around the bars, about an inch above Hannibal’s own. Hannibal’s own hand moved up, his fingers curling over Will’s. Will swallowed, simultaneously aching to pull back and to slide closer. He elected to stay perfectly still.

Hannibal’s fingers found Will’s wedding ring, tracing over it gently. Will watched his face carefully, saw the subtle clench of his jaw, the hardening behind his eyes. “Even in your kindness you are cruel to me.”

“It was never my *kindness* that drew you to me.”

“Perhaps not.” Hannibal’s fingers slipped beneath his, and Will allowed his hand to be pulled from the bars. Hannibal’s grip was light, allowing him the chance to pull away. He stepped closer, placed a gentle kiss to Will’s knuckles, breathing deeply against the skin.

“Enough.”

Hannibal released him without.

Will took a step back from the bars, almost staggered, as if touch had been the only thing supporting him. Hannibal leaned closer. “A woman? You tried to scrub her perfume from her skin with cheap hotel soap, but I know your scent.” He licked his lips. “Something more than that, cheap aftershave, like something a child would pick out. Is there a child in your life?”

“Stop.”

“A ready made family for you to fit yourself into, to pretend you’re one of them. But you’re not like them, are you, Will?” Will didn’t respond, simply waited, hands in his pockets, jaw clenched. “There were no descriptions of the yards… did you notice how they looked when you were there?”

“Big. High fences, with trees.” He frowned. “Why?”

“If he feels a special connection with the moon, he may wish to go out and look at it. High fences would provide the privacy required for that. Have you seen blood in the moonlight? It appears quite black.”

“I’ll take your word for it.” He couldn't hide the bitterness of his tone.

Why do they call him the Tooth Fairy?”

“He comes at night. He bites. It’s not particularly clever.”

“No.” The corners of Hannibal’s mouth twitch up some. “How do you suppose he feels about the name?”

“I can’t imagine he’s fond of it."

“I never did much enjoy the titles. Media has such a fixation with coming up with a witty label that they seldom find one that accurately depicts the subject.” He watched Will carefully. “Though, I’m sure you’re well acquainted with that sort of thing. What was it they called you again?”

Will knew he was being egged on, still he humoured Hannibal. “Bluebeard’s bride.”

“Yes, a complete disavowal of the original tale, and a discredit to both of us.” A pause, as he cocked his head to one side. “On the topic of wives, does your’s know you came to see me?”

Will clenched his jaw. “I think we’re done for the day.”

“An absence of answer is answer enough.”

“Goodbye Hannibal.” He turned towards the door.

“Until next time, dear Will.”

Will felt a shudder run down his spine, knowing he would be back.

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

> I know it's been a while, and I'm sorry this is kinda short.... It's been hard for me to focus on this one lately.....

Will sat and watched the home movies, the ones that had been taken in as evidence from the families. They were happy. That was the thought that plagued him the most. They were so happy.

Will thought of his own childhood, of an absent mother, and an emotionally distant, drunken father. He thought of TV dinners, and of working in the boat yard with his dad much younger than he should have been. He thought of all this, and he understood, at least somewhat. The Tooth Fairy picked happy families because he resented them, felt rage that they had experienced a joy he himself had been denied. It might not be much to go on from an investigative perspective, but still, it helped him to better understand the other man. And to understand, of course, was the first step to catching him.

It wasn't much, but it was something.

******

Next time Will found himself in the lab he was staring down not at the body of a person, but of a cat. His brow furrowed deeply as he looked down at the small, furry body, while Price and Zeller did their strange, back-and-forth way of providing information.

The gist of it was that the cat had been strangled, about a week prior to the death of the Leeds family.

Will nodded. "The dog and then this. He kills the pets first. They're an early warning system."

Jack was watching him curiously, as though waiting for him to continue.

Will sighed. "Send out a bulletin to vets, a wide range… tell them to report any animal mutilations to the bureau, it might give us a sense of who to keep and eye on at the very least."

"Will." Jack said, and Will glanced in his direction.

“What is it?”

“These cases were four states apart. Do you have any idea what they had in common?”

Will ran a hand over his face, tugging at the skin beneath his eyes. He thought of Molly, and then he thought of Hannibal. “They were happy.”

*****

Later that day found him in the Leeds’ backyard, pacing. He wasn’t sure what he was looking for, merely allowed himself to feel, to consider.

He found broken branches, and more than that, he found a symbol, a Chinese character if he had to guess, graven into the wood of the tree.

“You were watching them.” He muttered to himself. “You built yourself a little tree fort to spy on them.” He shook his head, taking a picture of the symbol where it was engraved. At the base of the tree he found an empty pop can as well, he used a stick to pick it up, avoiding fingerprints. The can itself was marked with the indents of teeth.

He tucked it into an evidence bag, having some on him just in case. As he crossed the yard away from the treeline, a familiar voice -one he had hoped not to hear again- called out to him. “Is that evidence, or are you just doing your part to keep our environment clean.”

Will ignored her, pressed right past, but she hung close, hovering at his shoulder, her blue eyes watchful and clever. “When’d they call you in?”

“I’m not talking to you, Freddie.” The words came out like a growl.

“Why not? We’re on the same side.”

“The same side?” Will raised an eyebrow. “After what you wrote about me? Calling me Bluebeard’s Bride?”

“It’s close enough isn’t it?”

“Inaccurate at best.” Will scoffed.

“And at worst?”

“Tasteless.”

“How does the Tooth Fairy compare to Hannibal Lecter?”

“He doesn’t.” There was a warning in his tone. “Goodbye, Freddie.”

She called out something else to him, but he ignored it, rage was boiling in his blood but he kept going.

*****

That night Will dreamt he stood with one foot either side of a rapidly widening crevice. On one side was Molly, clutching Walter to her chest. On the other side stood a familiar beast, gaunt and black with great antlers protruding from its skull. It smiled at him, all teeth and held out a hand.

Wind buffeted him, knocking him off balance as the crevice grew wider, and below him, Will could fear searing heat, see the light of distant flames. A hand reached from beneath him, and he toppled, catching the cliffs edge just in time.

Molly screamed, the sound nearly drowned out by the wind, and by the deep growling which rose up from beneath him.

Above him, the monstrous thing crouched down, holding out a hand still smiling. Always fucking smiling.

He woke up in a puddle of sweat. Sat up, panting in the dark room, his shoulders shaking just a bit. The time on the hotel alarm clock read 3:04 am, Will needed to be at work in four hours, but he doubted he'd be able to fall back asleep before then.

Instead he stripped off his shirt, hauling himself out of bed and off in the direction of the bathroom, at the very least he could have a shower.

*****

Hannibal was confused when he found himself being brought his phone. The guard told him it was a call from his lawyer, and Hannibal's frown deepened just a bit. He had not been in touch with his lawyer in recent days. Still he was intrigued, he accepted the call, and the guard left, giving him some small amount of privacy.

"Hello?"

"Hello, Dr. Lecter." The voice that came through the phone was low, hardly more than a whisper, it was unfamiliar to him, but he knew instantly who it must be. Hannibal remained silent, waiting. "I read in the paper that you'd taken in…. Interest in me. I'm glad. I've been an avid fan of your work for some time now."

“Have you?” Hannibal felt the corners of his mouth turn up just a bit at that. “Then you must know enough to know it isn’t just me who’s taken interest.” He paused. “I suppose I should thank you, after all, it was your work that brought him back to me.”

“Will Graham.”

“Yes. Our stories are joined together by him. How does your story end?”

“I want to be recognized by you. I have things I’d… love to show you.”

“I’m sure you do. I know all about what you’ve done so far, Chicago and Buffalo. I love your work.” A pause. “You took a risk calling here. Why did you?”

“There’s…. Something I need to tell you. About what I am, and… what I am becoming.”

Hannibal felt his lips pull up into a smile. “And what are you becoming?”

The man’s voice came like a growl through the phone. “The Great… Red… Dragon.”

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

hi I'm sorry it's been so long.... live uhhhhhh has been a lot

The decision to have him see someone was Jack's, though Will was fairly certain it had come at Alana's behest. He had chosen the therapist himself, out of some inherent curiosity. It was hard not to jump at the opportunity to meet the woman who had called herself Hannibal Lecter's therapist.

Now, Will sat across from Doctor Du Maurier, her eyes watching him curiously, narrowed, two watchful chips of ice. "Why did you choose me, Will? I was told you refused to see anyone else."

Will pressed his lips together carefully. "You and I share a friend in common."

She cocked her head to one side, just a small movement, calculated. "Friend isn't the word I'd use. Then again, I don't think it's the one you'd use either."

"I was being generous." Will leaned forward just a bit, elbows resting on his knees, head resting on his hands. "Regardless, you are… uniquely positioned to assist with my situation."

"You think that by having a base understanding of Hannibal Lecter, I can better understand you?"

"We are… bound up in one another, him and I."

"Conjoined?"

"Inextricably."

"Hannibal left his marks on you, both physical and otherwise." She folds her hands neatly in her lap. "But you left marks of your own in return, did you not?"

"What kind of patient was Hannibal Lecter?"

"An uncooperative one, something I imagine the two of you will have in common."

"I'm here aren't I?"

Her lips twitched up just a bit at that. "You're here at the FBIs behest, yes. But you chose me because it benefitted a personal agenda."

“I have a question.”

“That’s not generally how this works.” She smiled tightly. “Go ahead.”

“How did you manage to walk away unscarred? I’m covered in scars.”

She leans back in her chair slightly, head cocked to one side. “I never allowed myself the… *vulnerability* you had.”

“I didn’t exactly have a say in the matter.”

She smirked just a bit at that. “Is your wife aware that you’re seeing Hannibal again?”

Will’s jaw clenched just a bit at that. “No.”

She nodded again, just once. “Your experience of Hannibal has damaged your ability to think rationally.”

It’s a shot, and he knows it, his retort is quick, and biting.

“You know, I did my research on you. You left psychiatry for a time after a patient died in your office.”

“He swallowed his own tongue, during an episode, yes. I’d rather not talk about it.”

“I’m just curious… wasn’t it Dr. Lecter who referred him to you? Kind of a funny coincidence.”

Bedelia narrows her eyes at him ever so slightly, a warning clear in her gaze. “You more than anyone should know how… *persuasive* Hannibal Lecter can be. You had a hand in two deaths during your time with him, did you not?”

“One.” He corrected her. One had been the number that had come up in court, and Will wasn’t about to start going back on statements now.

“One, of course. My mistake.” Her smile is sharp, and it doesn’t reach her eyes. “The point is that Hannibal has a way of… forcing one’s hand. It’s easy for him to convince an innocent person that they’re a killer.”

“You’re not convinced?”

“You’re not a killer, Will.”

He chews the inside of his cheek. “I’m not sure you know me well enough to say that.”

“When I look at you, I see a man who is capable of violence only in moments of desperation. You have too much compassion. It’s what sets you and Hannibal apart.”

“And you?”

Dr. Du Maurier just blinks at him. “If you want my professional opinion, though I know you won’t take it, you should stop seeing him altogether. Best to turn back while you can still save yourself.”

“It’s a nice thought.” He presses his lips together. “But I think that ship sailed three years ago.”

*****

He listens to Zeller and Price’s bickering tangent with a distant kind of boredom, the whole time his mind was occupied by what came next. He needed to talk to Hannibal again, and it was a need that burned up under his skin, that occupied every corner of his mind not claimed by the dragon until he could think of nothing else.

The dental impressions on the coke can match the ones on the cheese found in the fridge at the Leeds house match the ones found on the bodies of Mrs. Leeds and Mrs. Jacobi but that doesn’t mean anything in the end. The problem, at core, is that dental impressions are useless unless you have records to match them, and they’ve found nothing.

It’s the symbol in the tree that he brings to Hannibal’s attention, glossy printed photos that Hannibal insists he put through the sliding food tray despite the fact that Will could easily show him through the bars.

Hannibal eyes the image curiously, before turning his gaze back up to Will. “It’s a character on a mah-jong tile,” he said, and Will rolled his eyes.

“I was hoping for some deeper insight, Doctor.”

“What was that?”

Will grit his teeth. “I was hoping for some deeper insight, *Hannibal* .”

“It’s a lucky sign, sometimes referred to as the Red Dragon.” A pause, and a sly twist of lips. “And behold a great red dragon… Are you familiar with the world of William Blake, Will?”

“Not particularly.”

“One painting of his springs to mind. *The Great Red Dragon and the Woman Clothed with the Sun.* Few images in Western art radiate such a unique and nightmarish charge of demonic sexuality.” He cocks his head to one side. “Perhaps this painting has caught our shy boy’s attention.”

“You’re enjoying this.” Will narrows his eyes a bit.

“Aren’t you?”

“People are dying.”

“That doesn’t mean you’re not enjoying yourself.” A pause, and a sly smile. “You have that light in your eyes, a dog to the hunt.”

“I just need to find out how he’s choosing them.

“And what if it is truly random?”

“I have to believe there’s a common factor, and that we will find it.”

Hannibal’s lips twitch just a bit at that. “Eleven days, Will. Tick tock. Wouldn’t want to lose another family.”

Will narrows his eyes just a bit at that. “You know something, you’re pretty smug, considering when all this is over, I get to walk out of here and leave you alone again.”

“You’re enjoying this, aren’t you?”

“I’m not sure I know what you mean.”

Hannibal laughed. “You like feeling in control of the situation.” A pause, punctuated by a sly kind of smile. “I wonder what you’d do if you could get a hand on me now.”

“I’d kill you. If I could.”

“Is that all?” The sentence was dripping with innuendo, his eyes heavy as they met Will’s gaze.

He looked too smug. Will clenched his jaw. “We’re not here to talk about me.”

“This killer, Will, what do you think he wants?”

“He wants what everyone wants, connection. He wants to be understood, but fears the vulnerability that comes with it.”

Hannibal cocked his head to one side, curious. “Are we still talking about the Dragon?”

“It’s all the same in the end, isn’t it?”

“Yes, I suppose it is.” A pause. “No one ever asks what you want, do they?"

“I want this all to be over.”

“You truly believe that once this ends, you can walk out that door and never come back?”

“Wishful thinking it clouding your judgement, Hannibal.” Will retorted. “I’m not attached to you in the way you are to me.”

Hannibal stepped close, close enough that the bars nearly brushed his face, his hands coming up to grip them as he leaned in. “I don’t believe you.”

Will stepped back. “I’m leaving.”

Hannibal smiled, dropping his hands from the bars and tucking them neatly behind his back. “I’ll see you again soon, Will.”

“Not if I catch him.” Will replied, and left without another word.

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

ahhh back at it again with the super delayed updates....

The decision to make the phone call was a spiteful one, Hannibal could admit to that. Still spite was not necessarily poor motivation. It was all too easy to get a hold of Will's contact information, and subsequently of his home address, and he was sure there was something to be said of Frederick Chilton's arrogance showing through in his lax security. It had been ridiculously easy, to the point where Hannibal had been almost disappointed.

Not, of course, that he was complaining since the whole affair had worked out quite dramatically in his favour.

He wasn't sure exactly how he felt with Will's address fresh in his mind. Pleased, certainly, but there was something else, some deep ache that accompanied it.

*****

Will dreams that night that a monster crawls into bed with him, holding him close. He feels its weight atop him, comforting even as it crushes. Darkness crawls up inside him, and he clings to it, pulling it closer.

Then he feels teeth sink into his throat and *tear* .

He wakes soaked in sweat, and panting, and he presses his face into the pillow for a long moment, feeling a scream build up underneath his throat. He takes a cold shower, and tries not to think about it.

*****

Will isn't sure why going to the museum will help him, but he's running out of ideas really. He thinks it will help, if he *looks* . He needs to see what the Dragon sees. Will blanches just a bit when the woman at the counter tells him he's the second person to ask to see it today, it could be coincidence. But something tells him it's not.

He's not lucky enough for it to be a coincidence. He knows that better than anyone. There's an element of dread to it, the fact that he might come face-to-face with the dragon, but it's overlaid by something else, something that boils up from deep inside him. Something almost excited at the prospect.

The dread continues to mount as they descend in the elevator, reaching a crescendo of anticipation as the doors open.

He's here. Will's not sure exactly how he knows that to be fact, but he can feel it in his gut.

"Paula? I have another visitor for the Great Red Dragon."

Will tenses at the lack of response from within the room, but doesn't warn the other man of what he's certain comes next. He follows the man into the room, his hands buried in his pockets, his gaze sweeping intently over the room, searching for some sign of motion, something to confirm his sense of impending attack.

He more feels than the sees the man who slips behind him, a figure slinking into the elevator. Will turns, moves closer, creeping towards the opening, and then all at once he sees him for the first time. The Dragon. As he meets the brown eyes of the man he's been hunting, he is struck, in that moment, by how *normal* he looks. This man who kills families, kills *children* looks like someone Will could encounter on the street. He should be used to that by now, but he still finds it jarring.

The man in the elevator meets his gaze and *snarls* , his lips curling back from teeth too straight to match the bite patterns Will's memorized and yet it *must* be him. He doesn't have time to register much past that when he's grabbed by the collar and thrown backwards with an alarming among of strength.

Will hears the crack as his skull hits the hard marble floor and feels his vision start to blur. He pushes himself up on legs that feel like liquid and starts to charge after the fleeing man. To be honest, the fact that he makes it all the way up the stairs is a shock and he finds himself collapsing on the floor in the museum lobby, blood dripping hot and sticky down the back of his neck. The world starts to blur around him, and all at once, Will passes out.

*****

The next thing Will is fully aware of is sitting in the back of an ambulance with a narrow light being shined into his eyes, he blinks blearily at it, his vision still not quite right. The next few hours are foggy. He gets six stitches in the back of his head, and the doctor tells him he's got a concussion. Will's not surprised. He knows he hit his head pretty hard, so he supposes that makes sense.

Overall he feels like shit.

The doctor tells him he needs bedrest and Will tries not to laugh. He won't have time for that, he'll have to push through the consequences of his concussion. He'll be fine, or he won't, it doesn't matter so long as he catches the Dragon.

As soon as he's released from the hospital, Will throws himself back into work. There's no time for bed rest, and a day later he's back in Jack Crawford's office, because it's where he has to be.

"He *ate* it?" Jack furrows his brow deeply. "The painting?"

Will snorts. "Ate it up."

"Why would he do that?"

Will sighs. "I think he… wanted to absorb it. Take the Dragon into himself, become the thing through consuming it. That or, asserting power over an image which previously controlled him?" Will frowns. "Hard to say for sure without more knowledge but…"

"But what, Will?"

"This is a beginning. He's gonna be different from now on, more confident."

"Different how?"

"I-" Will grits his teeth in frustration "I don't know that yet, Jack."

"Will, you're supposed to be the guy who can say for sure," Jack retorts.

"Yeah, well I've been out of practice," Will snaps. "You're the one who fucking dragged me out of retirement."

"Watch the tone Will, you *agreed* to this, remember?" He slams his hand down on his necks, the sudden noise makes Will wince just a bit.

Will shuts his eyes for a long moment, taking a slow, deep breath. "I warned you I wouldn't be what I used to," his voice is soft now.

"Why do I get the feeling there's something you're not telling me?" Jack's not yelling anymore, but the threat still lingers under his voice.

"What would I not be telling you?"

Jack narrows his eyes. "How did you know he'd be at the museum, Will?"

Will smiles, a cruel twist of his lips. "Jack Crawford… fisher of men. You caught me," his eyes flick up from the floor to Meet Jack's gaze. " *Hannibal* told me where to find him. He knows *exactly* who he is, fuck I wouldn't be surprised if he treated him."

Jack nods, just once. "Do you think you can get it out of him?"

“Not without a fight, no,” Will shakes his head. “He doesn’t *want* me to solve it. There’s no incentive. If I solve it I leave. More fun for him to draw it out. He has me *exactly* where he wants me.”

“Well then give him something.”

Will huffs a laugh. “What kind of *incentive* are we talking here, Jack? I doubt the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally insane allows *conjugal* visits.”

“Will-”

“It was a joke, Jack. Relax,” a sigh. “I figure the best I can do is… deny him. At least for a few days, force him to endure the isolation then, *maybe* he’ll be more willing to cooperate when I come back.”

“Then do that.”

Will nods once. On his way out of Jack’s office, he’s struck by the thought that things are going to get a lot worse from here. He doesn’t tell Jack what he thinks.

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

another short one, sorry about that gang

The Dragon calls Hannibal a few more times, and talks to him about how he feels. He tells him about Reba, about how soft she feels beneath her touch, how the Dragon aches to devour her but the man beats down the urge. And all the while, he thinks of Will, thinks of how sweetly the other man had slept in his arms, how delicate he'd felt in Hannibal's grasp.

He thinks of the ring on Will's finger and his lip curls with disdain. Then he has an idea, and he smiles, all teeth. "You don't have to kill her, you know," he licks his lips. "You can always toss the dragon to someone else."

The Dragon speaks slowly through the phone, as though measuring his thoughts carefully. "Will Graham… interests me."

Hook. Line. Sinker. "He has a family."

The Dragon hums.

"Save yourself," Hannibal says slowly. "Kill them all."

*****

Beverly catches him on his way out of Jack's office, pulling him down the corridor into a small alcove. "Hey," she looks up at him. "You okay?"

"Do you mean because of the concussion or because I've recently been forced to reunite with my serial killer ex?"

"Will-"

"I'm fine," he forces a smile. "Really, don't worry about me."

"I'm going to worry about you," she says, shaking her head. "Because this isn't exactly standard shit, Will."

"I'm aware of that, Beverly," he shakes his head. "I'm *fine* ."

“I just want to-”

“ *Beverly* ,” he cuts her off. “I said I’m *fine* .”

She winces at his tone, and Will almost regrets it. Almost. Beverly had been the one to pull him out, she was the reason he was here now, god knows what would have happened without her. She doesn’t deserve this. He can’t quite bring himself to care, he’s too far gone for this. He pulls his arm from her grip. “I have to go.”

He walks off down the hall. When he returns to his hotel room Will pours himself a glass of whiskey, downs it in one swallow, and then refills it, sipping the next glass slowly. He falls asleep with his jeans on and hopes not to dream.

*****

It’s been days since Will’s seen Hannibal, and he can feel it weighing on him. He can admit, only in the privacy of his own mind that there’s relief in going to see him again; in stepping through those doors and back into the chemical clean of the BSHCI. It’s like there’s a pull in his chest, drawing him to Hannibal, pulling him along an invisible string until he arrives, inevitably, to stand outside of Hannibal’s cell.

Hannibal who looks at him through the bars, lips twisting in a sly smile. “It’s been some time, Will. Get tired of chasing your tail?”

Will narrows his eyes at the other man. “I came to a realization.”

“Oh?” Hannibal cocks his head to one side. “Do tell.”

“I think you’ve been keeping something from me, Dr. Lecter,” his lips twitch just slightly.

“I might well be,” a pause. “Though I’d love to hear exactly what it is you think I’m keeping from you.”

“You sent me to the museum,” Will replies cooly. “You knew he would be there. He’s contacted you.”

“And how do you imagine he’s contacted me, dear Will?” Hannibal’s expression is the smug picture of calm. “All of my interactions with the outside world are thoroughly screened.”

Will takes a step closer to the bars, noting the slight shift in Hannibal’s posture. He lets his voice go a little softer. “Tell me who he is, and we can save a *family* , Hannibal. That’s not nothing.”

Hannibal smiles, all teeth. “When you close your eyes, is it your family you see?”

Will grits his teeth. “You *know* who they are.” It’s not a question, because he feels the answer in the pit of his chest.

“I do,” Hannibal admits.

“And you’re going to let them die?”

Hannibal’s expression is the picture of calm. “They’re not my family, Will. And I’m not letting them die. You are.”

Will leaves after that, knowing he won’t be getting much more out of Hannibal, at least not today.

*****

The news about Molly, when it reaches Will, takes a moment to properly set in. Truth be told, he’d grown so numb on the outside that his initial reaction had been a kind of blankness. After that it had just felt… *heavy* . An empty weight in the pit of his chest that was almost too much to bear. Not easy to reason with certainly.

She’s not conscious when he arrives at her hospital room, and she looks a pitiful thing, the IV in her hand steadily dripping, the wound in her shoulder freshly bandaged.

It could have been worse, he reminds himself, but somehow that reminder made things hurt all the more. He sits by her bed, and he watches. She’s in and out of it, more out than in really, and when she’s fully cognizant she’s *pissed* . She has a right to her anger, will won’t deny her that, and his own anger burns bright in his chest. Hannibal did this, Hannibal tried to take them from him.

Will wants to kill him.

He thinks about Hannibal as he sits by his wife’s bedside. He thinks about Hannibal as he holds the hand of Molly’s son, and tries to form explanations for stories told by Freddie fucking Lounds, and in his mind he pictures wrapping his fingers around Hannibal’s throat and *squeezing* .

He can’t find a word for what he feels, he’s angry, he knows that to be true, but the anger is laced through with longing, with regret, with a need he’s never quite been able to shake. And there’s something else, in some deep part of his chest, Will feels *flattered* . Because Hannibal did this *for* him, because this man would kill for him in a heartbeat, and there’s no way for to deny the power that makes him feel.

He’s not sure how to reconcile how he’s feeling, not sure how to fix things with Molly, or how to stop the Dragon, but he is sure of one thing.

He’s going to see Hannibal again.

Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

hi guys :) I am not dead

Hannibal had been expecting Will's arrival, of course he had; what he hadn't expected was the way the other man came barging in, throwing open the doors to the room where his cell was kept with a rage in his eyes which Hannibal hadn't seen in so long. He'd missed that fire, though he wasn't particularly pleased to find himself on the receiving end of it. Still, Hannibal would take what he could get.

"Hello, Will, it's nice to-" he's cut off when Will barges right up to his cell, hand shooting through the bars and gripping Hannibal by the collar. He's dragged forwards, his face slamming against the bars. His lip splits and he tastes blood, his gaze flicks up to Will's snarling face, and he's not surprised by the violence he sees there. It's righteous anger.

Beautiful . "What the fuck did you do?" Will's shouting as suddenly guards burst through the doors, grabbing him by the arms and hauling him back.

Hannibal laughs, blood still painting his lips, swiping his tongue across it and tasting copper. "You know how this ends, Will," he smiles with blood-stained teeth. "I merely offered you a push towards inevitability."

"Jealousy is an ugly look on you," Will spits back, allowing himself to be dragged back away from the cell.

"Yet righteous anger becomes you so," Hannibal hisses through the pain. "I'll see you soon, my love."

"Goodbye Dr. Lecter," and then Will is dragged out through the bars and away from Hannibal.

*****

"What the hell were you thinking?" Jack slams his fist down on the desk, another Will, in another time, might have flinched at the action, but this Will hardly notices. "I'm in the right mind to pull you from this case."

Will laughs at that, and Jack's face twists into something even more furious.

"Something funny?"

“If you were in your right mind, you wouldn’t have put me on the case in the first place,” Will smiles bitterly. “But you did, and now you’re blaming me for doing what needs to be done.”

“Bullshit.”

“I’m sorry?”

“You *attacked* an *inmate* , Will,” Jack bellows. “How am I supposed to explain that to my superiors?”

“He hurt Molly, Jack.”

“He did it to get a rise out of you.”

Will shakes his head at that. “No, that’s not it… he did it to make a point,” he sucks his teeth. “To *stake claim* ,” Will itches absently at the old bite on his shoulder. “If he can’t have me, then no one can,” he shakes it off, looking away from Jack, not able to stand the weight of that stare.

Jack just nods. “We need to focus on finding out how he got into contact with the Dragon in the first place.”

“Why don’t *you* ask him?” Will retorts. “I’m sure he’ll be forthcoming.”

“Will…”

Will pushes himself up out of the chair. “I need to go see my wife, Jack.”

“Fine,” Jack grits his teeth. “Take a few days off, get your shit together. If you can’t handle this, you're off the case. That’s it.”

“Fine,” Will turns on one heel and walks out of the office.

*****

It feels like an exercise in futility, sitting at the bedside of a woman with whom he’s certain his relationship had already ended. She hadn’t said it yet of course, hadn’t said much of anything, in and out of it on the drugs as she was, but Will knew he was running on borrowed time; he had been since he'd walked into the BSCHI, since the moment he'd laid eyes on Hannibal again.

Wally sat in the hospital waiting room, empty eyes locked on the baseball game playing on the television. His hands were rhythmically twisting and untwisting in the fabric of his shirt, and he hardly seemed to stir from his stupor when Will sat down beside him. They sat in silence for a long time, Wally's eyes locked on the TV, barely blinking.

Eventually he spoke, in a voice low enough that Will had to lean in closer to hear him. "Did you catch him?"

Will's jaw twitches at that. "No," he says after a long pause. "Not yet."

"You're gonna catch him right?"

"I'll catch him," Will says. *One way or another*, he doesn't say.

“That man deserves to die, for what he did,” Wally looks at Will with a gleam in his eye, too old for a kid his age.

Will wants to agree. He doesn’t. “It’s not up to us to judge who lives or dies.".

“He tried to kill mom,” Wally frowns. “You should kill him,” he turns his gaze back to the television in the hospital waiting room.

Will grits his teeth and thinks of Hannibal.

*****

His conversation with Molly, when she finally wakes up, goes about as well as he expected it to.

“What did you do, Will?” she asks, determination hard in her gaze.

“I’ve been to see him,” he says carefully.

“Lecter,” it’s not a question, and Will sees no point in attempting to lie.

“Yes.”

“Why didn’t you tell me?” Her brow is a deep furrow.

“I didn’t tell you, because I- I didn’t want you to worry.” It's not the truth, not exactly, and he can see in her eyes that she knows that as well.

Molly shakes her head. “It’s more than that, isn’t it?”

Will heaves a sigh. “I- felt guilty for speaking to him. For letting him back in.”

“I won’t lie and say I understand,” Molly swallows. “Did he have something to do with this?”

Will nods. “I hurt him,” he murmurs. “I really hurt him.”

Molly grits her teeth. “You put me in danger, Will. You put my *son* in danger.”

“You’re angry.”

“You’re damn right I’m angry,” she spits back.

Will just shakes his head. “You wanted me to do this.”

There’s a long pause before Molly speaks again. “Maybe I was wrong.”

“It doesn’t matter now,” Will replies shortly. “You know as well as I do, there’s no getting out of this for either of us. Not until I catch him.”

“I know that,” Molly’s eyes are beginning to drift shut, the painkillers taking their effect. “I just need time.”

“I know,” Will plants a kiss to her forehead and tries to ignore the part of him that screams that things between them will never be the same.

*****

It's four days later that Will finds himself sitting in Jack Crawford’s office, rubbing a hand over his tired face. He knows they have to figure out a way to end this, something to stop the Dragon in his tracks.

“Walk me through what’s going on inside that head of yours,” Jack’s voice is tight, carefully tailored to reveal as little of what’s going on inside of his head as possible.

“This needs to end,” Will replies shortly.

“What then? You’re quitting?” Jack’s eyes are laser focused on Will’s face, desperately searching for something. Not even Will knows what he’ll find there, but he seems satisfied after a moment, sitting back in his chair and crossing his arms over his chest. “No. No, of course you’re not. You can’t quit, not now.”

“You’ve said those words to me before, Jack,” Will’s voice is tight, his tone almost cutting. “And I did.”

“Too late last time,” Jack reminds him, his own hand twitching slightly, as though seeking the scar hidden just below the edge of his shirt collar.

“Too late again,” he doesn’t bother to disguise the bitterness there, Jack knows all too well what he was asking when he brought Will back into this. “Too late for Molly.”

“She survived.”

“For how long, Jack?” Will snaps back. “He still knows her name, he knows both of their names. He’ll be back, he’ll do everything in his power to take them. That’s what he *does* , no

survivors."

"Right," Jack takes a long, slow sip of his coffee. "So I'm asking you again, what's going on in that head of yours?"

Will takes a long breath, then lets it out. "We need to draw him out, Jack. Pull him to us."

"You want to bait him?"

"Ever the fisherman."

"And how, exactly, do you suggest we do that?" Jack raises an eyebrow. "Other than Molly and Walter, we don't know what he wants. Or have you forgotten that?"

Will shakes his head. "That's not exactly true, is it? We know enough."

"Care to elaborate?"

"His pattern… his *design* ," Will runs a hand over his face. "It's families, *happy* families. He destroys the thing he never had, the thing he believes he can never attain. If he can't have it, no one can."

"That doesn't exactly spell bait though, does it?"

"We need to talk to Hannibal, Jack," Will says carefully. "We need to find out how him and the Dragon got in contact, and what they've been communicating about. It's clear that Hannibal knows more about this guy than he's letting on, hell, he's probably been playing *him* too."

"You think that's where we'll get our bait?"

"I don't know what I think, but I know Hannibal has the answers."

"And you just assaulted him," Jack replies tightly.

"He'll get over it," Will all but rolls his eyes. "That's basically foreplay for him."

"You're not exactly making me feel better about vouching for you, Will."

"You knew exactly who you were vouching for when you called me in, you were in the same damn courtroom I was."

"It's not up to me anymore to allow you back into that room, Will."

"Then who's it up to?"

Jack sighs, there's a world-weary look in his eyes, he looks more tired than Will has ever seen him, except perhaps, for that night in Hannibal's dining room. "Walk with me," he says finally, and without pause, stands from his chair and strides towards the door.

Not certain of what else to do, Will follows.

*****

Will had first seen Dr. Frederick Chilton in a court room, and from the moment he'd laid eyes on the other man, he'd despised him.

He'd been called to the trial as a psychiatrist who had previously consulted on crimes committed by the Chesapeake Ripper - of course, no one thought it was entirely appropriate that Hannibal had done the very same thing. He had seen Frederick Chilton twice across the courtroom, once at Hannibal's sentencing, and again at his own - or rather lack thereof. Chilton had served nearly identical functions at both of the hearings; to declare Hannibal clinically insane, and to declare Will mentally unfit to stand trial. While the results had been functionally different, in both instances, Chilton had served the same role; to show people where the crazies were. And boy did he make a spectacle of it.

Will had hated Frederick Chilton from the moment he'd first heard the other man speak, and the quiet amusement he'd seen on Hannibal's face in court that day had told him exactly what the other man's feelings were for him. *A cat playing with it's food.*

Hannibal had found Frederick Chilton rude.

Will felt inclined to agree with that sentiment here, standing across from Chilton's desk, his arms crossed over his chest.

"Well, if it isn't Will Graham, I was so hoping we'd get a chance to meet face-to-face, what with the whole, assaulting one of my patients, debacle," his lilting voice makes Will's skin crawl, so he lets his gaze rest on the frames of his glasses, on the spot just below Chilton's right eye. "You understand, of course, my hesitancy to allow you further visitation."

It's clear he's not finished, so Will holds his tongue, receives his scolding like a good dog. Heels.

"No," Chilton shakes his head, giving a small click of his tongue. "No, I shouldn't have allowed this to happen in the first place, what with the - erm - *history* between you two."

Will's jaw twitched at that, and his eyes finally snapped to meet Chilton's gaze, narrowing behind the thick frames of his glasses. "Why did you then?" The words are quick, snapping in the air between the two men.

Jack puts a hand on Will's shoulder, and Will rocks back on his heels, slipping seamlessly back into his role in this. "What special agent Graham means to say…" he cuts in carefully, "is that we're both incredibly grateful for the ongoing assistance with this investigation. Your cooperation has been an immeasurable help to us so far."

"I'm sure he did," Chilton smiles tightly. "But in the interest of being perfectly candid, I will answer your question, *special agent* Graham."

Will raises an eyebrow expectantly.

“As mentioned in the papers you signed when you first arrived at the hospital, some of the patients here are under round-the-clock surveillance - high risk patients, of course.” He waves a hand dismissively. “Well… one such patient is our very own Dr. Hannibal Lecter.”

Will stiffens just a bit at that, his discussions with Hannibal, while case-oriented, were not something he wanted on record at all, let alone on *Chilton’s* records.

“Ah,” Chilton smiles, “Maybe you *hadn’t* read those waivers after all. Well,” he reaches for a drawer on the the opposite side of the desk. “I do have copies of them here, if you’d like to-”

“That’s quite alright, Doctor,” Jack holds up a hand. “We believe you.”

Will’s eyes flick to Jack, not liking what he sees there. “You knew about this.” It’s not a question, he doesn’t really need to ask.

“I knew it was a possibility.”

“He doesn’t talk much, that *Lecter* of yours,” Chilton counters. “Well… he doesn’t talk much to *me* , *you* on the other hand… he has plenty to say to you. Of course he would, when he does talk you’re his favourite topic of conversation. *How is Will Graham* ? He’s fascinated by you.”

Will clenches his jaw, his mind goes back over the conversations he’s had with Hannibal since his arriving at the BSCHI weeks ago. Nothing extremely incriminating, he concludes, still he would have preferred that those conversations remained private in their entirety.

“Does he know?”

“Pardon me?”

“Does Dr. Lecter know you’ve been recording him?” Will already knows the answer, he thinks, still he wants to hear Chilton say it himself.

Chilton chuckles at that. “No, he’s aware of the surveillance, but not the extent of it. Informed consent gets a bit… muddy in these sorts of situations.”

The confirmation sets rage boiling in Will’s chest.

“Now,” Chilton continues carefully. “I think it’s best to keep yourself and Lecter apart, for the moment at the very least, allow tensions to cool. I can’t have a liability on my hands, now can I?” His gaze meets Jack’s, ignoring Will entirely. “You understand, of course?”

“We’re not here to see Lecter,” Jack replies, “at least not for the moment.”

“You’re not?” Chilton cocks an eyebrow at that. “Well, now you’ve peaked my interest.”

“They’re in communication,” Will cuts in. “Hannibal and the Dragon.”

“Yes,” Chilton looks less than pleased at the topic of discussion. “Hannibal was supposedly receiving communications from his lawyer, evidently that wasn’t the case.”

“That’s a pretty major fault in your security,” Will cocks an eyebrow at that. “Do you think he’ll call again?”

“Hannibal’s had his phone privileges revoked for the moment,” he says carefully. “Can’t exactly allow something like that to happen without consequences, now can I?”

“He’ll need them back,” Jack holds up a hand before Chilton can begin to protest. “He’ll need them back if the Dragon calls. We’ll want to trace the line.”

“And you think Lecter will agree to that?”

“Oh, absolutely not,” Will scoffs. “Which is why we have a plan B, no reason to leave it up to chance.”

“Certainly not when the people controlling that chance are a pair of psychopathic murderers.”

It bothers Will, hearing Chilton equate Hannibal with the Dragon, a novice to a master. He bites his cheek until he tastes blood.

“What sort of contingency are we talking about then?”

Will lets his eyes blur out as Jack explains the plan to Chilton, he knows it well enough, knows it will work, one way or another.

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